

Now  
Every  
Month

# THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

STORIES

Volume 9

FEBRUARY, 1959

Number 6

## NOVELET

- DREAMBOAT ..... *A. Bertram Chandler* 27  
Diego Ribiera just didn't fit in to the wardrobe of the Gamma Piscees; everyone expected the bio-chemist to be able to make good beer or wine on the side, and Diego lacked that talent. But what he could make was positively awe-inspiring!

## SHORT STORIES

- DELIVERY GUARANTEED (illustrated on cover) ..... 6  
..... *Calvin M. Knox*  
I had to deliver Erna's cargo to Ganymede — a historic log cabin, used by the Venusian rebel leader. But it didn't look as if Erna and I would ever get there, until...
- PARADOX LOST ..... *George H. Smith* 53  
Ever think how the future might look upon time travelers from today?
- THE LAST UNICORNS ..... *Edward D. Hoch* 123  
Hmm — maybe this is why they aren't around anymore.

## SERIAL NOVEL

- CADUCEUS WILD (2nd of 4 Parts) ..... 60  
..... *Ward Moore & Robert Bradford*  
Cyrus Tarn wanted to give himself up, so that Virginia Carling and her brother could escape from the medarchy, but there was a reason why she wouldn't allow it. And, if they could get away, they had to discover how, and by whom they had been betrayed!

## DEPARTMENTS

- LET THE READER BEWARE (editorial) ..... 24  
..... *Robert A. W. Lowndes*  
Our September editorial was somewhat booby-trapped, you see...
- THE LAST WORD and THE RECKONING ..... 125
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON ..... 129/130

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Next issue on sale January 1, 1959

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, February, 1959, published 10 times a year (monthly, except for October and December) by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Entire contents copyright 1958 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 36c per copy; yearly subscriptions \$3.00. Printed in the U. S. A.

# ★ PARADOX LOST ★

Vignette by George H. Smith

**T**HE FAT little 23rd Century official said to Steven Polson, "I'm afraid that I don't believe you."

"What do you mean you don't believe me? I'm here, aren't I?" Steven demanded. "I appeared before you in a locked room, didn't I? Do you believe that I'm a time traveler from the 20th Century or do you prefer to think I'm some sort of ghost?"

"Frankly I prefer to think that you're some sort of ghost."

"What utter nonsense!" Steven snorted. "Are you or are you not an official of the government? Is this or is it not a time of scientific achievement? A time in which superstition has disappeared."

The little man glanced at the door of his office as though afraid someone might enter at any moment. "Yes, I'm a government official. I'm the head of the B.F.P.P. and..."

"Well! I see that governments are still afflicted with alphabetitis," Steven sneered. "I might say I had expected something more advanced but I suppose bureaucrats are always the same."

The man at the desk looked hurt but attempted to go on. "...and this is a time of scientific achievement..."

"Then why don't you believe in time travel?" Steven interrupted again. "Why won't you believe that I'm from the past?"

"Well, you see, sir... I'm the head of the B.F.P.P. and the policy of the B.F.P.P. is to..."

"I'm not interested in your bureaucrat boondoggling. I asked you a question. Answer it."

"I'm sorry, but..."

"Why don't you believe that I'm a time traveler?"

"Because time travel is impossible, sir."

"Impossible? N o n s e n s e!  
I'm here, am I not?"

"Yes, you're here but..."

"But you think I'm a ghost.  
How ridiculous! I'm from the  
past I tell you."

**T**HE LITTLE man shifted  
in his chair again before he  
said gently, "Wouldn't you  
juts as soon admit that you're  
a ghost and go away? It  
would mean so much less  
trouble for everyone."

"I'll do nothing of the kind.  
Why should I?" Steven de-  
manded.

"Well... I just thought...  
you see, I'm the head of the  
B.F.P.P. and..."

"You public servants are all  
alike...can't keep a civil  
tongue in your heads. Answer  
my question," Steven said.

"I'm sorry, sir, but time  
travel is impossible because it  
would be a paradox, and a  
paradox could change the  
whole matrix of time—result-  
ing in the disappearance of  
our civilization."

"My good man," Steven  
said trying to control his exas-  
peration, "I am Steven Polson  
from the 20th Century. Time

travel has happened and it is  
*not* a paradox."

"If it had actually hap-  
pened, it would have been in  
the history books. It would  
have stated that Steven Polson  
of the 20th Century invented  
a time machine and inter-  
viewed an official named  
Donald Jackson..."

"What do I care what the  
history books say or don't  
say? I'm here and here's my  
time machine," Steven said,  
reaching one hand into noth-  
ingness and pulling into view  
a cage-like device.

"Well, now, that does look  
like a time machine," the little  
man agreed. "But time ma-  
chines are impossible, for they  
would be paradoxes—and  
paradoxes are bad."

"That is about the silliest  
thing I've ever heard," Steven  
snapped.

**T**HE LITTLE man stood up  
and shook his head sadly.  
"But you see, we of the 23rd  
Century have made a very  
careful study of the phenom-  
ena of time travel, and its pos-  
sible effects on mankind. As  
far back as 1999, it was dis-  
covered that the beings known

to our ancestors as ghosts were people who traveled in time and...died outside of their time, thus being doomed to exist in a half-world of time forever. In later years, it was discovered that it was a good thing that these people have always failed and died in the attempt, because successful time travel would lead to paradoxes which might mean disaster for the human race."

"What do you mean?"

"Well...you're sure you wouldn't like to admit you're a ghost and just disappear?"

"No, I definitely would not!"

"I was afraid that you wouldn't," the little man said sadly. "Our scientists reasoned that if time travel were possible, we would have heard from the future. Well, we haven't—so it follows that time travel is impossible. That is why it is so fortunate that all time travelers are really ghosts."

"But I'm *not* a ghost—I'm here. I don't know what happened to the others but *I made it.*"

"No one knew for a great many years what happened to

the others. In fact, it is only in our times that the truth has become known."

"Well—do you admit that I'm from the past and that I'm alive?"

"Yes...you're from the past and you're alive—and that makes you a paradox."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, you see, our scientists take the matter very seriously and have even gone so far as to have a government agency set up to prevent paradoxes. Hence, we have no paradoxes."

"But I exist. You said yourself that I'm a paradox because I'm from the past."

DONALD JACKSON smiled and said patiently, "But you see, sir, you couldn't be—not really—or your discovery would have gotten into the history books."

"Ha!" Steven exclaimed triumphantly. He reached into the time machine and scooped out an armful of papers. "See this? These are my records. As soon as I get back I'll publish them, and..."

"Those are all your records? You brought them all with you?"

"Of course, you idiot. You don't think I'd take a chance on leaving them behind for someone else to steal, do you?"

The little bureaucrat reached into his desk drawer. "No, I don't suppose you would, sir," he said unhappily.

"And as soon as I do that, I'll be in all the history books, and you'll have a whole ton of your blasted paradoxes."

Donald Jackson slowly lifted a small tube from his open drawer. "There really aren't any paradoxes," he said as a

golden pencil of fire leaped from the tube and reduced Steven Polson, time machine and record to a small pile of ashes. "Because you see we've found that we prefer ghosts to paradoxes!"

As he sat back down again, his eyes lingered on the ashes and muttered, "Too bad, too bad." Then he reached for the phone, dialed a number and said briskly, "This is Jackson of the Bureau for the Prevention of Paradoxes. Will you please send a robot janitor up to my office to sweep up some paradoxical ashes?"